



December 4, 1986

Fire Island Public Opinion Survey: Summary of Findings

Allan R. Barnes

Suggested citation

Barnes, Allan R. (1986). *Fire Island Public Opinion Survey: Summary of Findings*. Report prepared for the Alaska Department of Corrections. Anchorage, AK: School of Justice, University of Alaska, Anchorage.

Summary

Under the terms of a contract between the Alaska Department of Corrections and the University of Alaska, Anchorage, to determine the feasibility of placing a prison on Fire Island, the UAA School of Justice in November 1986 conducted a public opinion telephone survey of a random sample of one thousand residents of the Municipality of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Results indicated that respondents favored spending money to prevent and deter crime rather than to punish prisoners or to build additional prisons. When informed about the increased cost of construction and operation of a prison on Fire Island in comparison with other potential sites in Southcentral Alaska, they did not favor building a prison on Fire Island. However, in deciding the appropriate location for a new prison, cost of construction was not deemed as important as either the impact of the prison on the local economy or the costs associated with everyday operations and programs of the new prison.

Additional information

This report is part of the Fire Island Prison Feasibility Study, a project conducted jointly by the School of Justice and School of Engineering at University of Alaska, Anchorage under contract to the Alaska Department of Corrections. The project undertook to assess the feasibility of locating a correctional facility on a 4,240 acre tract of land on Fire Island, which lies in Upper Cook Inlet about three miles off Point Campbell within the Municipality of Anchorage. The project was divided into three major phases: (1) an assessment of future bed space needs of the Alaska Department of Corrections; (2) an evaluation of the physical site and cost estimates for prison construction and operation; and (3) a public opinion survey and open discussion.

The project's three major reports include:

- *Alaska Correctional Requirements: A Forecast of Prison Population through the Year 2000* by Allan R. Barnes and Richard McCleary (1986);
- *Engineering Feasibility Study of Fire Island as a Location for a Future Correctional Facility: Final Report* edited by David C. Junge (1986);
- *Fire Island Public Opinion Survey: Summary of Findings* by Allan R. Barnes (1986).

Additional reports include:

- *Alaska Correctional Requirements: A Forecast of Prison Population through the Year 2000 — Executive Summary* by UAA School of Justice (1986);
- *Technical Memorandum: Site Assessment and Site Evaluation* by UAA School of Engineering (1986);
- *Fire Island Feasibility Study: Summary Report — Final Report* by UAA School of Justice and UAA School of Engineering (1986).

FIRE ISLAND PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY:

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



JUSTICE CENTER

**University of Alaska, Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska**

FIRE ISLAND PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY:

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Allan R. Barnes



School of Justice
University of Alaska, Anchorage
3211 Providence Drive
Anchorage, AK 99508

December 4, 1986

JC 8519.05

FIRE ISLAND PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY:

Summary of Findings

Under the terms of a contract between the Alaska Department of Corrections and the University of Alaska, Anchorage, to determine the feasibility of placing a prison on Fire Island, the University has completed a telephone survey in preparation for a public forum concerning the Fire Island site. The purpose of the public forum will be to review the previously completed prison population forecasts and engineering feasibility study and obtain public reactions to the findings.

METHOD

This report is based on a public opinion telephone survey conducted by the School of Justice, November 1 - 11, 1986. A random sample of one thousand people were interviewed from the Municipality of Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

The survey instrument was constructed by the School of Justice in conjunction with the Department of Corrections. Pretests of the instrument were conducted during the last two weeks of October. A training session for the twelve interviewers was held to familiarize them with the instrument and procedures.

The individuals interviewed were obtained by assigning random numbers to the telephone prefixes for the Anchorage and Mat-Su area (see Appendix A). Five hundred completed surveys were

obtained for each area. Overall, the average age of respondents was 38 years, 87% were white and 57% were female. Appendix B contains the demographic breakdown by area. The survey group can be described as those individuals at least 18 years old who reside in households with telephones. The existence of a high percentage of females in the respondent group may be due to several factors. Despite this, there are no changes in the results due to gender, area surveyed or a combination of the two.

All calls were made during the period November 1-11, 1986 from 5:00-9:00 p.m. weekdays, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Saturdays and 1:00-5:00 p.m. Sundays. No calls were made on Election Day, November 4. A random 5% callback to confirm interviews revealed no errors.

Our large random sample enables us to say that the responses are accurate with an error rate of only \pm 3.1 percentage points overall and + 4.4 percentage points for either the Municipality of Anchorage or the Matanuska-Susitna Borough individually. In other words, if we conducted the survey again we would expect the second and all subsequent samples to produce results that are no greater or less than 3.1 percentage points from the percentages obtained by this survey.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The response percentages for each question are presented in

Appendix C. The response percents of each choice are presented for the total sample, Anchorage and the Mat-Su borough. Choices typed in capital letters were not read to the respondents.

The results seem to indicate that the respondents favored spending money to prevent and deter crime rather than to punish prisoners or to build additional prisons. When informed about the increased cost of construction and operation, they also did not favor building a prison on Fire Island. In Anchorage, 58% of the respondents rejected Fire Island as a prison site. The cost of constructing a new prison, however, was not deemed as important in deciding the appropriate location as either the impact of the prison on the local economy or the costs associated with everyday operations and programs of the new prison.

Nearly thirty-eight percent of the respondents preferred locating any new prison for southcentral Alaska outside of the Matanuska Borough, Municipality of Anchorage and the Kenai Borough. Most of these people indicated a preference for a remote location such as an Aleutian chain site or other rural area of the state.

APPENDIX A - PREFIX LOCATIONS

Anchorage Area Prefixes:

243	337	562
248	338	563
272	344	653 Bird, Indian
274	345	688 Chugiak
276	346	694 Eagle River
277	349	753 Elmendorf
278	428	783 Girdwood
279	522	
333	561	

Matanuska-Susitna Area Prefixes:

373	Wasilla
376	Wasilla
495	Willow
583	Tyonek
733	Talkeetna
745	Palmer
746	Palmer
892	Big Lake

APPENDIX B
Demographics of the Survey Sample

AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION:

AGE	ANCHORAGE		MAT-SU	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
18-25	36	29	19	26
26-29	31	46	25	54
30-35	48	66	47	82
36-40	30	43	35	38
41-50	30	46	44	38
51-86	<u>40</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>45</u>
TOTAL	215	275	211	283

RACE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION:

RACE	ANCHORAGE		MAT-SU	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
White	184	226	190	266
Black	11	13	2	2
Alaska Native	2	7	11	7
Hispanic	6	7	2	0
Asian	3	11	0	1
American Indian	4	3	2	7
Other	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	215	276	210	284

APPENDIX C - 1986 FIRE ISLAND PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY
RESPONSE PERCENTAGES

QUESTIONS	CHOICES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGES			
		Accuracy:	Total ± 3.1	Anchorage ± 4.4	Mat-Su ± 4.4
Q 1. Do you believe Alaska is tough on crime?	1. YES		32.5	34.2	30.8
	2. NO		59.1	56.2	62.0
	8. DON'T KNOW		8.2	9.6	6.8
	9. REFUSED		.2	-0-	.4
Q 2. Are you willing to spend additional tax dollars to get tough on crime?	1. YES		77.6	74.0	81.2
	2. NO		18.3	20.4	16.2
	8. DON'T KNOW		4.0	5.4	2.6
	9. REFUSED		.1	.2	-0-
Q 3. Please choose the # 1 purpose for getting tough on crime:	1. to deter or prevent crime from happening		53.8	51.4	56.2
	2. to rehabilitate offenders		10.2	11.2	9.2
	3. to punish offenders		13.2	12.2	14.2
	4. to keep offenders off the streets		20.0	23.0	17.0
	7. OTHER		1.3	.8	1.8
	8. DON'T KNOW		1.3	1.2	1.4
	9. REFUSED		.2	.2	.2
Q 4. Do you think putting more people in prison reduces the crime rate?	1. YES		35.4	33.6	37.2
	2. NO		60.4	61.0	59.8
	8. DON'T KNOW		4.0	5.4	2.6
	9. REFUSED		.2	-0-	.4
Q 5A. Recent studies indicate that additional facil- ities for housing long-term prisoners will be needed for Southcentral Alaska in the future. Where would you most like to see them located?	1. Mat-Su Borough		21.5	20.0	23.0
	2. Municipality of Anchorage		15.4	15.2	15.6
	3. Kenai Borough		13.5	16.4	10.6
	4. Somewhere else		37.8	36.6	39.0
	8. DON'T KNOW		11.1	11.4	10.8
	9. REFUSED		.6	.4	.8
Q 5B. Where would that be? [only asked if respondent chose "somewhere else"]					

QUESTIONS	CHOICES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGES		
	Accuracy:	Total + 3.1	Anchorage + 4.4	Mat-Su + 4.4
Q 6. In determining where these prison facilities should be located, if they were built, which of the following is most important to you? Please choose one. The:	1. cost of construction 2. cost of running the prison 3. cost of support + rehabilitation 4. cost of prison security, or 5. impact on local economy 7. OTHER 8. DON'T KNOW 9. REFUSED	10.3 22.6 18.5 8.7 33.7 1.8 4.2 .1	11.2 25.8 18.0 7.0 31.8 1.2 4.6 .2	9.4 19.4 19.0 10.4 35.6 2.4 3.8 -0-
Q 7. Fire Island has been suggested as a prison site. This would cost \$16 million more than building a prison at other sites in Southcentral Alaska; also, operating costs would be significantly higher there. In light of this information, would you be in favor of building a prison on Fire Island?	1. YES 2. NO 8. DON'T KNOW 9. REFUSED	39.2 55.7 4.9 .2	35.8 58.0 6.0 .2	42.6 53.4 3.8 .2
Q 8. In what year were you born? (average age)		38.0	38.0	37.5
Q 9. Would you describe yourself as being:	1. White 2. Black 3. Alaska Native 4. Hispanic 5. Asian (includes Pacific Islander) or 6. American Indian? 7. OTHER 8. DON'T KNOW 9. REFUSED	87.4 2.8 2.7 1.5 1.5 1.6 1.9 .1 .5	83.0 4.8 1.8 2.6 2.8 1.4 2.8 .2 .6	91.8 .8 3.6 .4 .2 1.8 1.0 -0- .4
Q 10. ARE YOU	1. MALE 2. FEMALE	43.0 57.0	43.0 56.0	42.2 57.0